From:	Christy Agner
To:	Ben Pendry; Chris Williams; Cory Causby; Kelli Brown; Kyle Pifer; Melissa Wargo; Mike Byers; Rich Price; Richard Starnes; Sam Miller; Shea Browning; William Moultrie
Subject:	NC Tribune + partner news, Week of June 8-12; lots of partner news this week
Date:	Friday, June 12, 2026 6:42:19 PM
Attachments:	Weekly Federal Recap for June 12 2026.msg A Region Rooted in Rural Resilience - Copy.pdf

Team, please see the NC Tribune + partner news, the Week of June 8-12. On the federal front, the new Administration's proposed rules contemplate significant changes to federal grant applications, the award process, and post-award responsibilities. On the state front, the goal post for a budget release has moved to the week of June 22. At this time, I do not anticipate we will have a new comprehensive state budget prior to the start of the new Fiscal Year on July 1. Congrats to Kevan Frazier on receiving the President's Award by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. Enjoy - Christy

Federal (*see detail on the attached 'weekly Federal Recap'*)

- Administration Releases Redline on Accreditation Negotiated Rulemaking
- The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) released a 267-page notice of proposed rulemaking signaling that it will allow sports event contracts in national prediction markets. Observers say that prediction markets are really gambling and should be regulated on a state by state basis.
    - The rules discuss allowing "final scores, point differentials, win-loss results, tournament advancement, individual or team statistical performance or season long performance metrics,"
    - They would disallow trades on a "specific play called for or executed by a specific player or team," such as a single pitch in baseball, a single shot in hockey or a single foul in basketball.
    - They would not allow trades on physical fights during games, injuries, officiating decisions or pre-collegiate sports events' such as high school games.
- US Department of Education statement of House passage of HR 7892 (No Aid for Ghost Students Act)
- DOE issues a fact sheet on the Administration's student loan repayment program changes
- U.S. Department of Education Announces Connecting Talent to Opportunity Challenge Semifinalists: *Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Montana, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia*.

Congress (*see detail on the attached 'weekly Federal Recap'*)

- The House is close to finishing the markups for all twelve FY 27 spending bills while the Senate markup schedule has stalled while party leaders negotiate topline funding levels.
- House LHHS-Education Bill Advances for Floor Consideration, Key Amendments

Debated and Adopted

- Senate Sets Aggressive Timeline for College Sports Bill
- H.R. 7892, the No Aid for Ghost Students Act, zeroes in on so-called ghost students, who apply via FAFSA and cash in on college and student aid using fake or stolen identities.
- **The Protect College Sports Act** is predicted for a Senate markup next month. Per AASCU '*this bill seeks to establish a national framework for college athletics and student-athlete compensation, but it does not address whether student-athletes should be classified as employees. While the bill has received support from the Administration and Senate leaders on both sides of the aisle, House Republicans have raised concerns about several provisions. Ongoing differences between the two chambers could complicate the legislation's path forward'*

State

NC Health and Human Services awarded EMS Workforce grants through the NC Rural Health Transformation Program. Local awardees amongst the 39 local EMS agencies include Buncombe, Cherokee, Clay and Graham agencies. *Many WCU students work and study with these agencies.*

Treasurer's Office / State Health Plan announced shared updates on a healthy benefit to certain plan holders. Eat Well Pilot Program provides $80 monthly grocery benefit for certain foods to a limited number of plan members that have a diagnosis of a cardiometabolic condition.

WNC Recovery shared a successful DC trip this week, with Sharon Decker and Kevin Corbin traveling with Governor Stein to visit the Congressional Delegation.

Economic Development Partnership of NC, a partner of NC Commerce, met in Cherokee on Wednesday and Thursday. The members toured Cherokee and the surrounding economic development assets and heard from Chief Hicks regarding his vision for partnerships.

NCGA – *Christy was at the NCGA Monday and Tuesday this week. The Senate announced Senate 'policy' committees are shutting down next week & the budget release date was punted to June 22. With the prolonged budget negotiations, it is unclear when the NCGA may wrap in the summer.*

Bill updates

HB 1123, The UNC Omnibus and Capital Contracting law changes is in the House for concurrence. As a reminder, this bill started out as the policy provisions for the UNC System, as well as self-liquidating projects.

HB 1203 Family Support for Those Who Serve Act is moving in the House, and would expand tuition waivers at Community Colleges to the children of certain public safety employees . Of note, during the committee debate, a member asked about future expansion, specifically to NC Promise Schools. The bill sponsor said he is open to expansion of the policy moving forward.

HB 1126 2026 DST Admin/Technical/Clarifying Changes is moving through the Senate. It

makes broad changes to retirement systems, the State Health Plan, investment authority, unclaimed property procedures, and government finance operations, including expanded administrative powers, new reporting requirements, stricter compliance penalties, and updated eligibility for finance programs. Of note, the text expands maternity coverage to SHP dependents.

SB 445 Regulatory Reform Act. In education, the bill permits students to complete surveys tied to college admissions tests, broadens allowable uses of Personal Education Savings Accounts, and adjusts accountability timelines for educator preparation programs. The House adapted this Senate bill in committee and sends it back to the Senate for concurrence, which is unlikely. A conference committee is expected.

HB 1214 *Make E-Verify Great Again*, addresses compliance for state and local government employers with E-Verify, and protects employers from violations if employees provide fraudulent documents. The bill gives the Labor Commissioner five exempt FTE to administer random compliance checks.

- Rep. Gillespie's newsletter highlighted 11 constituents receiving Golden Leaf Scholarships, including five attending WCU (from Clay, Macon, and Cherokee counties)
- Rep. Sarah Stevens resigned this week to spend time on her statewide Courts campaign. After nine terms, she was not running for reelection. The Surry & Wilkes County district will name a replacement later this month. The anticipated nominee is Dan Kiger, former HP trooper.

Local

The Jackson Board of Elections voted to establish WCU's HHS building (community room) as an Early Vote and Election Day voting site. As the vote was not unanimous, the State Board of Elections will review the county's voting location plan and render a final decision for the 2026 general election. The SBE is scheduled to meet in July.

Partners

Golden Leaf Scholarship recipients (215) were announced this week. The scholarship provides $3500 annually for four years. Here is the link to all the recipients. A quick analysis shows students selecting WCU, by county here: Jackson (2 of 2), Cherokee (1 of 2) , Clay (1 of 2), Graham (0 of 4), Macon (3 of 3), Rutherford, (0 of 8), Swain, (0 of 3), Transylvania (0 of 1). There is not a public list that shows all recipients choosing WCU, of the 215 recipients.

NCAA updated its implementation resource FAQs on D1 Age-based collegiate eligibility model, in advance of late June meetings. Feedback is requested to EligibilityModel@ncaa.org

- NCAA Division I Age-Based Collegiate Eligibility Model – Implementation Resource – Updated June 11.
- NCAA Division I Age-Based Collegiate Eligibility Model – Question and Answer Document – Updated June 11.

Mountain West Partnership named Eli Hashimi as its new director, as current director Josh Carpenter is moving to the private sector. MWP is part of the **Southwestern Commission**.

Southwestern Commission newsletter included the following WCU reference: *The*

Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging is proud to be a partner in a project that will be recognized by Western Carolina University for its outstanding community impact. WCU's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning will award its 2026 Community-Engaged Teaching, Learning & Research Award to the Interdisciplinary Dementia Care Course and The Healthy Brain Club on Wednesday, June 10. The innovative service-learning program prepares students to provide dementia-capable care while offering meaningful activities for older adults living with dementia and valuable respite for family caregivers. The Healthy Brain Club addresses a critical need in western North Carolina by combining classroom instruction with hands-on experience. Students work directly with participants to deliver evidence-based programming while gaining practical skills to help meet the growing demand for dementia care professionals. The project is a collaborative effort involving faculty from multiple disciplines at Western Carolina University, the Jackson County Department on Aging, Cullowhee United Methodist Church, and the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging. Area Agency on Aging representative Sarajane Melton served as a project collaborator

NC Rural Center director Patrick Woodie provided the keynote to WCU's Seeds and Soil (CCESL) partnership event. His presentation centered on demographic and policy matters related to WNC and rurality data. The slides are attached for your awareness.

SECU Public Fellows from WCU started with their internship sites this week. WCU students receiving the SECU $5k summer learning stipend are at the following sites: Museum of the Cherokee People, Appalachian Community Services, REACH of Haywood, Bella View Farm Animal Sanctuary

Appalachian Community Relief, One House Creative LLC, City of Burlington Office of Emergency Management, Cumberland County Sheriffs Office, North Carolina Poetry Society, High Lonesome Therapeutic Equestrian Center, UNIDXS, Behavioral Frameworks, Loblolly Press / Carolina Book List, Autism After 18, Kinston Teens, Wilkes County Sheriffs Office, Circles of Jackson County, Haywood Christian Ministry, The News of Orange County.

Statewide News

EducationNC covered School nutrition programs are asking for state investment in nutrition budgets following federal reimbursement rates that are not pacing inflation and wage adjustements. *Keeping our eye on school nutrition programs re: Laboratory School.*

North Carolina owns a piece of Claude North Carolina's **State Investment Authority** put $250 million into AI firm **Anthropic** back in the winter when the San Francisco company **sought $30 billion** in Series G venture capital, State Treasurer Brad Briner says. The purchase 's value has since grown to $650 million, and it's possible that even greater returns will come the state's way if Anthropic goes public. "Who knows what's next," Briner says, adding that Anthropic after an IPO "could become a trillion-dollar company, easily." The move came because Anthropic's AI platform, **Claude**, is among the sector's most promising. The company's revenue growth is "like nothing ever seen," Briner says. It's forecast hitting the break-even point in 2028, according to reports in *The Guardian* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Briner says the state likely has additional dollars in Anthropic via some of its outside-fund holdings. "We have wait for [first-quarter] statements" from them to know the extent of their holdings on that front, he says. Briner's comments on Monday came four days before SpaceX's IPO hits the market. That's brought questions to the treasurer's office from national media curious about the state's holdings of it and AI firms like Anthropic. The state has "between $30 million and and $35 million" in SpaceX via its outside funds," Briner says. That'll

probably grow once index funds start adding it to their portfolios. All told, the state investment fund has about $147 billion in capital, mainly from North Carolina's pension funds for state and local-government employees. As of **mid-May**, the State Investment Authority has about $8.1 billion in private-equity holdings of various sorts. On a separate track, Briner says he'd be open to seeing the Investment Authority put money into a North Carolina-based Major League Baseball franchise if Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon or other potential owners are able to land one. The key thing, he says, is that "we'd look" only if such an investment appears likely to exceed the 6.5% annual return the pension plans target. "I'm a big baseball fan," he says. "I would love to see Raleigh get an MLB [team] and, personally, as a taxpayer, I'd love to support that. But as treasurer, we have to make money." Briner has acknowledged that his office last year **passed** on a chance to own a piece of the Hurricanes, the state's pro hockey franchise that's now battling for its second Stanley Cup title.

Higher Education

Employers and colleges are working together in unprecedented ways to create lasting good jobs in western NC // Alli Lindenberg Semon Good Jobs WNC is uniting 11 community colleges and dozens of local employers to align classroom training with regional hiring needs in health care, manufacturing, and skilled trades. Learn more about how this coalition is shaping the future of western N.C.

A group formed to advise on Carolina North has some questions for UNC Jane Winik Sartwell/The Raleigh News & Observer At the first meeting of the Carolina North stakeholder advisory committee, one phrase prevailed: "We don't know yet." Carolina North is a 230-acre tract of land one-and-a-half miles north of the main campus, where UNC plans to build a satellite campus. It's a project the school has been considering for decades, but under the leadership of Chancellor Lee Roberts, plans for development have come into focus — sort of. Tiffany Lacey, UNC's executive director of real estate development, explained to the committee that the university is not yet at "step one" of the project, and a lot of the specifics remain unclear. Still, Roberts believes the university needs to start developing Carolina North as quickly as possible to address enrollment growth pressures, the need for new research facilities, and housing affordability challenges in Chapel Hill. The school is already working with three outside companies to reach that first step. **[Read more here]**

Big changes for more than 200k NC student loan borrowers as SAVE plan set to dissolve Kate Denning/Carolina Public Press The student loan repayment plan, Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE), introduced by former President Joe Biden will officially cease in light of the passage of President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act last summer. An estimated 269,000 North Carolina borrowers who are enrolled in SAVE will need to select a new repayment option within 90 days after July 1. Just two repayment plan options — the Tiered Standard Plan and Repayment Assistance Plan — will be available once SAVE dissolves and the Income-Contingent Repayment Plan and the Pay As You Earn Plan are sunset in 2028. Under the Tiered Standard Plan, the monthly payment will be a fixed amount in a certain amount of time depending on the outstanding principal balance, the amount of money

borrowed not including interest. Payments must be at least $50 a month but can be more if it's needed to repay within the allotted time. **[Read more here]**

Squabbles over early voting sites are déjà vu for several NC counties Sarah Michels/Carolina Public Press When history repeats itself, it's usually not so quickly. During the lead-up to the primary election, students at Western Carolina University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and University of North Carolina-Greensboro raised alarms about the exclusion of campus early voting sites from county plans. At WCU, it was a break from longstanding tradition. NC A&T and UNCG hadn't hosted midterm primary early voting sites before, but their campuses had been used for presidential primary and general elections. The College Democrats of North Carolina and several students sued, arguing that removing or rejecting campus early voting sites discriminated against younger voters by enacting high barriers to the right to vote.
While US District Court Judge William Osteen dismissed the case just days before early voting began in February, he may experience a bit of déjà vu this fall. **[Read more here]**

Elon hires engineering school dean Elon University hired John Walz as dean of its new **School of Engineering and Computing**, which expects to open this fall with 20 full-time faculty and more than 300 undergraduate students. Walz is president emeritus of the private Milwaukee School of Engineering in Wisconsin, where he achieved record undergraduate enrollment, expanded industry partnerships and helped raise more than $150 million. He previously was a dean at the University of Kentucky's engineering school and has worked at Virginia Tech and Yale. He has a Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University. "His experience leading engineering programs, combined with his collaborative leadership style and strategic vision, make him exceptionally well suited to guide the School of Engineering and Computing during this important moment in its history," Provost Rebecca Kohn said in a release.

Regional News

Christ School plans faculty housing, academic expansion in Buncombe County *(Asheville Citizen Times)* Christ School in Arden is planning to add 12 faculty housing units and a new academic building as part of a campus expansion. The private Episcopal boarding school, which enrolls about 308 students on a 450-acre campus, said the project will increase on-campus housing options for existing faculty members.

WorldAtlas names Asheville a top NC place to live, but locals describe a mixed market Shelly Garzon/WLOS Asheville recently landed on a WorldAtlas list of the best places to live in North Carolina. While the recognition highlights what makes Asheville attractive, local realtors and business owners say they're seeing a more complex picture on the ground. Local realtor J. Michael Manley says the housing market has cooled compared to a few years ago. "As far as the total number of purchasers that are purchasing in the area, that has definitely slowed down," Manley said. Despite housing market slowdowns, Asheville remains in the national spotlight. Local realtors say many people moved to the mountains during the pandemic or invested in second homes. "The short-term home rental market has been huge in

Asheville in years past. So that has steadied a lot more in the last two years. Yet what we're still seeing is that people are still moving here. It's just not as much as they were, say three years ago," Manley said. **[Read more here]**

Chase opens first branch in Asheville Chase opened its first branch in Asheville and plans to open three branches in the region over the next three years. A second branch in the Buncombe County city is expected to open later this year. JPMorgan Chase opened its first branch in North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 2019, and now has nearly 60 branches in the state. Chase is the largest U.S. bank by revenue, with assets of $4.9 trillion and $364 billion in stockholders' equity, as of March 31. Read more in this **report**.

Exit Closure on US 74 Due to the Russ Avenue project in Waynesville, **exit 102** (the **Russ Ave exit**) on **US 74 westbound** is closing starting Monday, June 8, and continuing until approximately August 30, 2026. The **detour** will follow **US 74 West to Exit 100** and back to US 74 East to Exit 102. Exits **102A and 102B heading east will remain open** during this period.